

MURDERS OF CONVEYANCE
BY JEANNE BURROWS-JOHNSON

CHAPTER 4
How easily murder is discovered!
William Shakespeare [1564 - 1616]

By five twenty, we were walking toward the elevator, attired in casual aloha wear, sandals and the purple *leis* we had received at Pinky's. Even as a *kama`aina*, I enjoyed dressing up like a tourist for an evening on the town. Having been proficient at solving the clues that day, we had arrived at each scavenger hunt destination in time to note the winners. Now we were looking forward to ogling their prizes at the cocktail party.

As usual, Jason Chin opened his program with the warmth one expects in the Islands. "Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I hope you've enjoyed learning more about Hawai'i, especially the lovely town of Kailua on the windward side of the island. This morning, I gave you an assignment, in addition to your first clue for the scavenger hunt. So let's see how you and your coaches have done. A-lo-ha!"

A resounding response of *A-lo-ha* answered him.

"That's much better than this morning, but I need a bit more spirit from you. Let's try that again. A-lo-ha!"

This time there was a booming reply, as everyone, including the wait staff, returned the word with the oomph Jason sought. Introductions of special attendees followed, including the mayor, one of the co-producers of *Hawaii Five-O*, and Miss Hawai'i, our first greeter of the morning. Finally, we got to see the successful contestants receive their rewards.

The college boys who had won the tour of the island were as great at one-liners from the podium as they were at the Pali Lookout. Despite being computer science majors, it sounded like they could have successful careers in standup comedy. The father-daughter duo that won the Hawaiian quilt were newcomers to Honolulu and the girl's comments about her deceased mother having been a quilter were moving. Finally, there was the University of Hawai'i professor who won a year's worth of dinners at Pinky's. I anticipated that Keoni and I were bound to meet him and his wife some evening, since the restaurant is not too far from our home.

With a blank agenda that night, our group decided to prowl through Waikīkī. Both Keoni and I were tired of playing host and quickly agreed to have Dan be the designated driver. Margie and I left the men to their conversations in the front seats of the rental car. While they discussed the finer points of scavenger hunts, we sat in the back gossiping about families of naval personnel we have known over the years—and the remodeling project that awaits her delicate touch upon her return home.

After our encounter with the Don Ho look-alike, we were in the mood for a vintage dinner show and decided to use some of our discounts for the Blue Hawai'i Elvis show. The venue was fine, and the buffet dinner was superior to many I have consumed through the years. Best of all, the act was enjoyable, even for those of us who were old enough to remember The Man himself. We talked about having a nightcap but anticipating our early morning commitment we decided to halt our partying.

When Dan dropped Keoni and me off at the front of the hotel, we hurried into the lobby anticipating a quick trip to dreamland. But that was not to be. Fortunately, the O'Haras were staying on a different floor, so they were uninvolved with what materialized. Upon exiting the

elevator, hotel security chief Alec Salinas was standing with a uniformed policewoman, ready to forestall anyone turning to the right.

“Sorry,” said officer Horita, beginning her short speech of redirection. “Oh, hello, again,” she interrupted herself.

“Alena, I’m sure it will be OK,” said Alec. “These are friends of the Lieutenant. In fact, Keoni here is John’s old partner.”

“Yes, I know. We met last year on a case in Lanikai,” the young officer replied.

“So, what’s up?” Keoni asked, nodding to the officer and shaking his former colleague’s hand.

“Well, if something involves John, you know the theme. There’s been a murder. Just down the hallway.”

“I guess that means we won’t be staying in our suite tonight,” I speculated.

“That’s right. I’m supposed to send anyone headed that way back to the lobby to be assigned a new room,” Alec said.

“What about our things?” I inquired.

“I’m sorry, but you can’t take anything out of the crime scene,” declared Officer Horita.

“I tell you what, Alena, how about I stay here with Keoni and Natalie and you check in with the Lieutenant to see if we can work something out.”

It only took a second for her to concur. While she was gone, we chatted with Alec, who revealed the barest of details about the crime that had occurred in the last couple of hours.

“I got a call from the head of the night housekeeping crew. One of her staff was in hysterics over finding a man lying in the hallway. When I got there, it was obvious he wasn’t going to get up again on his own, so I put in a call to HPD. John’s usually on days, but he had a case that ran late. As one of his colleagues had called in sick, John said he’d take the case since he was over at the Hilton Hawaiian Village.”

“COD?” asked Keoni.

“Cause of Death was a single gunshot to the head,” answered John Dias coming around the corner.

Signaling Alena Horita to remain with Alec at the elevators, he beckoned us to follow him.

“So, what brings you two into the land of the *touri*?” queried John. “Nothing murderous I trust.”

Keoni put up his hands. “We’re completely uninvolved with whatever case brought you here. Almost tourists ourselves this week.”

“You’ve probably heard about the Aloha Scavenger Hunt,” I said.

“Yeah. A couple of young guys from the night shift are participating in it.”

“Well, Nathan still volunteers at Hale Malolo which is part of a conglomerate of several non-profits. He was telling us about the hunt benefitting local organizations that help women and children, and we decided to take part,” I explained.

“It’s lucky for us he’s no longer on Hale Malolo’s board of directors. That qualified us to enter a drawing for a week’s stay here at the hotel—which I’m glad to announce we won,” said Keoni.

“The accommodations are really nice, with kitchens and whirlpool baths. I invited Margie and Dan O’Hara to come over from San Diego for the event and we’ve been hitting a lot of tourist spots,” I added.

Looking toward our suite, I could see that the victim’s body had been removed. Aside from various police personnel, the most obvious indication of a major crime was the taped outline of a

body lying diagonally across the floor—and a sizable pool of blood.

Seeing me staring at the crime scene, John quipped, “Haven’t had any interesting visions lately, have you Natalie?”

“No,” I replied. “I haven’t had *any* visions for months. And, except for dreaming about Miss Una chasing baby bunnies in The Ladies garden, the only dream I recall is something out of a black and white classic movie.”

“That’s good. After our last case in your neighborhood, we agreed you’d try to make it a full year without murder and mayhem tripping you up. Speaking of which, how are Miriam’s Ladies doing?”

“They’re fine. They still miss Miriam, of course, but they’ve settled into a quiet routine in the cottage. Joanne still plays in the garden, under Miss Una’s close supervision. Samantha’s continuing with her classes in college. And, Izzy’s having a great time with her family down the road.”

John nodded and asked, “So, which is your suite?”

“It’s the second one on the left,” replied Keoni.

“That’s convenient. It’s not really in the crime scene. Why don’t you go clear your things while I get the front desk to prep another room for you?” offered John.

“Thanks,” said Keoni. “I would appreciate being able to use my own toothbrush.”

“Do you have any idea how many rooms in this corridor are occupied?” asked John.

“Only a couple, since a high school sports team departed this morning. They’re the reason why we couldn’t get a suite for the O’Haras near ours,” I noted.

I inserted my key card, sighing at the thought of having to change suites. Considering the possibility of one of John’s bosses showing up and questioning our presence near the crime scene, Keoni suggested we hurry. We began stuffing our belongings into our bags. But despite the small number of items I had brought, they seemed to have increased in volume.

“Uh, honey, do you think you could put my slippers and nightgown in one of your bags?” I asked.

“What?” he replied, putting the last of his toiletries into his shaving kit. “*Miss I-travel-light* can’t get the genie back in the bottle?”

As we re-entered the hall, I saw that the CSI team and their equipment had departed. John Dias was conversing with a woman who must have been a hotel guest since she was standing beside a single suitcase that looked as though it had been in storage for decades. Glancing toward the wall, I noticed a sun hat to the left of the stark outline of the victim’s head.

“Do you want to wait here while I get the bellman, or at least his luggage trolley?” asked Keoni.

“Sure, dear,” I answered, drifting off in thought.

Within a minute, the Lieutenant and the hotel guest had terminated their conversation. After picking up her small bag and hat, the woman in the deep red suit and white blouse straightened her posture. Instantaneously, a realization hit me: Everything I saw before me looked familiar. In fact, it mimicked the image of the black and white movie I had dreamed of more than once recently. The first time was last Thursday night. The next was Friday, when we were watching classic movies here. There was, however, one major difference between my dream and this crime. The images I saw were of an earlier era.

As John glanced over at me, I tried to gather energy for the conversation that was to come.

“So, are you two all set?” he asked, stopping beside me as the woman moved toward the elevator.

“Yes. We’ve packed and Keoni’s gone to arrange for everything to be moved.”

“That’s good. I’ve spoken with the organizers of the scavenger hunt and they’re going to proceed with the event.”

“I’m glad of that. You can imagine how much the contestants will appreciate it—especially people like Margie and Dan who’ve come so far.”

“That’s certainly true,” said the Lieutenant with a snort. “After what happened during their last couple of visits to the Islands, I hope you can finally have some fun with them.”

He looked ready to leave. I had to say something.

“Uh, John...before you go, I think there’s something I have to mention.”

Twisting my hands like a school girl, I sighed and looked him in the eye.

“Oh, no, not again. I thought you said you hadn’t had any visions lately.”

“Well, I didn’t think I had...until I got a clear look at your crime scene ...without all the people blocking my view.”

“Uh-huh,” he said encouraging me to continue.

“Well, mmm. Until I saw that lady’s hat, I thought what I said was true. But, before we came to Honolulu for the scavenger hunt, I had a dream in black and white—like an old movie.”

Recognizing the waters we were about to tread, John let out a sigh and pulled out his notepad. “All right. Go on.”

“Then, like I said before, Keoni and I watched a couple of movies after dinner on Friday night. I fell asleep part way through our film festival and experienced the same dream I’d had the night before at home. We often watch old movies and I thought my dream was a replay of scenes from one I’ve watched before.

“But then—I mean, now—seeing that woman’s hat set against the wall, near the head of the outline of a body angled diagonally, well, it just came together. Your crime scene really looks like my dream—except that what I saw in my dream dates from about sixty years ago.”

The Lieutenant halted his note taking. “What do you mean?”

“Well, first of all my dream wasn’t set in this hotel. It was an old hotel. It was a dark interior, with narrow hallways and scarred wood flooring with a runner down the middle for carpeting. And, there was a metal cage for a single old-fashioned elevator car.”

Just then, a bell announced the arrival of an elevator on our floor. I heard Keoni talking to Alena and Alec. A moment later he came around the corner pulling a luggage trolley.

“With your moving so many people out of their rooms JD, the bellman was jammed so I just grabbed this cart. We’ll be out of your way in just a minute.”

“Actually, there’s been a slight change in my plans. Go ahead and move your belongings to your new suite. Natalie will be staying with me until some of the CSI team returns. Once they’ve taken over, Natalie and I will join you, so I can finish a little, ah...research. Right, Natalie?”

“Yes, John,” I affirmed.

“Uh, is there something you two aren’t telling me?” Keoni asked, looking back and forth between John and me.

“You know those black and white dreams I’ve been having from an old murder mystery?” I began.

“Yes. We saw *The Maltese Falcon*, a Charlie Chan movie, and something else the night we arrived here,” Keoni replied.

“Did I mention I’d had the same dream the night before we left home,” I asked him.

“Oh. I see,” responded my sweetheart with a slow nod.

“Well, I’m just hearing the story. I’m afraid tonight’s festivities are going to be a bit longer

than you may have intended,” said John.

“Well then, I guess a little coffee is in order. I’ll get some started as soon as I get in the new suite. We’re up one floor, down the left corridor at the end,” explained Keoni. After announcing the room number and handing me an entry card, he went to collect our bags.

“So, Natalie. I think we need to come up with a working title for you. How about *Special Consultant to the HPD Criminal Investigation Division*?” suggested John.

“You know I’m always happy to help you. But I don’t think there’s going to be very much that I can offer you this time. I just saw the man lying there on the floor. Except, well, it was a different floor. And a different hotel.”

“Okay. Keep going,” he said, writing in his usual small blue notebook.

“The hall in front of the old-fashioned elevator ran left and right. As you got out of the elevator cage, there were two levels of windows. The bottom three windows were covered by sheer curtains framed by dark drapes. Above those windows were three that were curved to form an arch.”

“Hmm. I think you mean clerestory windows.”

“Yes. That’s right. I turned to the right after leaving the elevator. After a few steps, there was a hallway that T’d off in two directions, I went to the left. And there he was: a man, lying face down, diagonally across the runner, near the end of the hallway. The man in *my* vision was dressed in a white suit and an aloha shirt. He had on two-toned wing tip shoes. And there was a fedora on the floor, on its edge against the right side of the hall.”

“You said he was wearing a white suit? You mean like an old-fashioned leisure suit?” questioned John.

“Yes, I guess that’s what it would be called,” I verified. “I think they’ve been making them for decades, with varying lapel widths and numbers of buttons.”

“What you saw was something like this?” he asked, pulling out his cell phone to click on an image.

And there it was. Or should I say, *he* was—lying face down diagonally on the floor of our hotel corridor. Tonight’s victim was wearing a vanilla ice cream colored suit. Except for the collar of his aloha shirt being wider than that in my vision, the scene was the same—down to a straw fedora leaning on its side against the wall, beyond the man’s head.

I inhaled deeply. “Yes, that’s him. I mean that except for the shirt, your victim and crime scene parallel my vision.

“Can you describe the man? Did you see his face?”

“No, like your picture, his head was turned the other way. And he’d been shot in the head. I, well, I didn’t look too closely.”

“I’m sorry to put you through this, Natalie. But do you think if I show you his face, you might be able to tell me something about him?”

I did not want to look at the face of a man who had just been shot in the head, but I knew I had to help in any way I could. “I guess I can try.”

“It’s not too bad, the side of the face I’m going to show you,” John said, trying to reassure me.

He then touched his smart phone’s screen and began scrolling through some pictures. When he had selected an image, he handed me the phone. At that moment, Keoni entered the hallway with the luggage trolley fully loaded.

Looking down, I cringed as I recognized the man. “It’s the old linguistics professor from China. He was on that tour of Kawai Nui Marsh last summer with the Chinese medical students

who were visiting the University of Hawai'i. He loves everything about the Islands and has helped with planning the scavenger hunt."

"Well, that will make some things easier," acknowledged the Lieutenant.

"I don't think he had a suite on this floor," Keoni interjected before departing for our new suite.

"He didn't have any ID on him. Now that we know his identity, we'll be able to run that info past the front desk," said John. "You're sure the vision you experienced wasn't in this hotel?"

"Definitely not."

Listening to movement and conversation coming toward us, John gestured for us to discontinue our conversation. In a moment, the CSI team came around the corner. After giving them some instructions, John nodded to me and we went to join Keoni.

When I opened the door to our new suite, I could smell the aroma of fresh coffee. "I made an executive decision. The coffee is strong and fully loaded with caffeine," announced Keoni.

"That's good, because the evening isn't getting any shorter. But I'm not complaining, Natalie. Your little *dreams*, as you call them, have always proven invaluable," said our guest.

Once we were settled with coffee and an open box of white chocolate covered macadamia nuts, John pulled out his notebook again. "All, right, let me see where we were. You were saying that the layout of the body and the hat were like those in my crime scene. But *your vision* was set in an *old* hotel."

I looked around the suite we were sitting in. "This hotel is bright, wide, streamlined and modern. The rooms are large and have attached bathrooms. What I saw in my vision was from when I was a little girl—mid-twentieth century. The room behind the victim was small and dark. It had heavy wood furniture: a single bed; dresser; small desk with chair; one-night stand; two old brass lamps; and a closet with dressing room. No bathroom. There were a few clothes on hangers and an open suitcase on an old-style wooden rack. It had curved legs and wooden rods...not at all like the ones they use today with aluminum tubing. The woman was sorting through some things inside the suitcase, but I couldn't see what she was looking at."

"The woman? What woman?" asked John, looking up attentively.

I shifted in my seat and Keoni put his arm across my shoulders to reassure me. "There was a woman with her back to me. First, she was in the bedroom, crouched down looking under the bed. Then she went through all the drawers in the room. Wherever she went, she faced away from me, or was bent over at angles that prevented my seeing her face. When she finished searching the bedroom, she entered the closet. Suddenly I was standing behind her, but the space was dark and I couldn't see much."

"Tell me everything you can remember about the woman," requested John.

"I don't know what I can tell you. I couldn't identify colors, just shades—whether something was white, gray, or maybe black. And everything seemed slightly blurred—like an old homemade movie.

"I can say the woman was tall and slim. Her legs were muscular, like those of a dancer or athlete. She walked with determination and I felt she was fairly young. She wore high heels, but they weren't like today's. They were thicker and not as high. They weren't platforms; the soles looked like plain leather when she walked away from me. Her hair was very dark, maybe black. She wore it in an elegant French twist. She had no hat. No purse. Nothing in her hands.

"She was wearing a fairly dark suit. It wasn't as dark as black or navy blue. The jacket flared from her waist over her hips. It had a single row of buttons down the middle and I

remember thinking the collar was rather wide. I could see the cuffs of a white blouse under her jacket at her wrists. I think the skirt had a kick pleat in the back because she moved very easily, even though the skirt was long and straight.”

“As always, Natalie, that’s a good description,” John said looking at me and then Keoni. “The only catch is that the woman you saw is probably dead, or in a nursing home by now. Can you tell me anything about her face?”

“Not really. Her back was to me the whole time. She seemed to know what she was doing—methodical, fast, smooth, like she’d done that kind of thing before. At the back of the closet’s dressing room was a large mirror, but I couldn’t see her face because it was all speckled—you know—dirty and old, like the silver is coming off the back.”

“Anything else come to mind? What about her skin color? Light, dark?” questioned John.

“Like I said, I don’t know. There was contrast against the dark shade of the jacket, so I guess she wasn’t African. She could have been Caucasian, Asian or *hapa* anything.”

“I don’t suppose you saw any tattoos, scars or birthmarks?”

I shook my head in reply.

“Nails? Watch? Jewelry?” he asked, reaching for any kind of distinctive feature.

“Well, she was wearing a dark fingernail polish. With the clothes looking mid-twentieth century, I guess that would mean dark red. I saw the flash of a ring, but I don’t remember which hand it was on. And since the scene was in black and white, I don’t know if it was in gold or silver. With the long sleeves of the suit, I couldn’t tell if there was a watch or bracelet.”

“Hmm. She may have been engaged or married. Okay, Natalie. I think we’ve done as much as we can right now. You and I will talk later. I’ll see if I can figure out some way to tap into your vision—like we did with those photos of the room where Miriam died. Of course, give me a call if you remember anything else.

“As always, except for Keoni, please don’t discuss the case with anyone. I know it may be hard to avoid with Margie and Dan being teamed with you. But the fewer people who know the details of the Professor’s case and your vision, the better off we’ll be. Having said that, I’ll happily accept any details you might recall from this or any other of your visions. And keep your eyes open. You never know what you two might observe on this hunt of yours. I guess that’s it for tonight. Try not to have too much fun, kiddies,” said John with a broad smile.

After he left, Keoni and I speculated on the amount of information regarding the murder that would have been released by morning. We could always check in with John to determine the limits of what we can mention in public.

I did know one thing with certainty. Last summer I had experienced another vision resembling an old movie. As then, I lamented the fact that things had not turned out well for the star of my private preview.

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